

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT - COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
DELEGATION TO DUBLIN
OCTOBER 29TH 2008

See programme of visit attached.

A delegation from the European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs went to Dublin on October 29th 2008 to discuss the reasons and the consequences of the 'No' vote in Ireland and the possible responses that could be given.

The delegation was composed of Mr. Jo Leinen (Chairperson of the Committee), Mr. Enrique Barón Crespo, Mr. Elmar Brok, Mr. Richard Corbett, Mrs. Monica Frassoni and Mr. György Schöpflin. Mr. Brian Crowley and Mr. Proinsias De Rossa also attended the meeting with the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Ireland's future in the European Union.

During the discussions, all the interlocutors warned the members of the delegation that no new referendum would be possible before the European elections and that the Irish had not yet found concrete solutions to the problem of the ratification process.

Meeting with Mr. Dick Roche, Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for European Affairs

Minister Dick Roche, having welcomed the initiative of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs to come to Ireland, recalled the issues that were at stake in the Irish referendum. Ireland had not become eurosceptic, and the citizens still wanted to be part of the European Union. The current international and economic situation was another illustration of the necessity of being a member of a strong European Union.

There was a need for a citizen-friendly introduction to the Treaty, because many criticisms usually directed at Europe (such as the so-called lack of democracy or efficiency) actually found an answer in the Lisbon Treaty.

Nevertheless, according to Minister Roche, organizing a new referendum on the Lisbon Treaty before the European elections would not be a successful strategy. In response, members asked what made Minister Roche think that autumn would be a more favourable period than spring for another referendum. Minister Roche assumed that this lapse of time would give Europe the opportunity to demonstrate its added value, notably through its management of the financial and economic crisis.

Members expressed their concerns about not seeing the Lisbon Treaty entering into force before the European elections. Mr. Barón Crespo considered that if it was so, this would be the end of the Treaty.

Concerning the No vote, several members asked what concrete solutions were being proposed by the Irish authorities to assuage the concerns voiced in the referendum campaign. They recalled that guaranties could be given to the Irish citizen for them to be sure that the Lisbon Treaty would not endanger their fundamental values or their liberties.

As regards the size of the Commission, Minister Roche believed that it was possible to maintain one Commissioner per Member State; however, the attributions of the single Commissioners could be object of further discussion.

Meeting with the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Ireland's future in the European Union

The meeting with the Sub Committee, which is composed of members of Parliament and of Senators both in favour and against the Lisbon Treaty, was chaired by Senator Paschal Donohoe, Chairperson of the Sub Committee.

The members of the Sub Committee put many detailed questions about the functioning of the European Parliament, the codecision procedure, and about the means of control the European Parliament had over the principle of subsidiarity and, more generally, over the Council and the Commission. Two members of the Sub Committee expressed concerns about the Charter of Fundamental Rights, fearing that it would jeopardize essential Irish values and principles, relating to areas such as abortion and family law.

In response to these questions, the members of the delegation, and especially Mr. Brok, in his quality of rapporteur for national parliaments, insisted on the fact that the Lisbon Treaty would strengthen the powers not only of the European Parliament but also of national parliaments. The latter would gain control on the principle of subsidiarity and would be able to follow the whole legislative process, in closer cooperation with the European Parliament. National parliaments and the European parliament were not competitors, but they had to gain greater accountability from their respective Executives, which was precisely the aim of the Lisbon Treaty.

More generally the members of the delegation, among them Chair Leinen, recalled the internal and external reasons requiring the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. There was a dramatic need for stronger Institutions if Europe was to play the best role it could. The added value of Europe had been made clear in the economic crisis, and it should be borne in mind that if Ireland had not been a member of Economic and Monetary Union, it would have suffered much more from the crisis.

As far as the ratification process was concerned, the members of the delegation thought that there was a window of opportunity before the European elections, and that the issue should at least be debated before the end of this parliamentary term. Mr. Corbett suggested that the Sub Committee come up with a list of selected demands on the basis of which the ratification process could be resumed.

If 26 Member States had ratified the Treaty, it may not be unthinkable to ask Ireland to reconsider its position. All European citizens had to be taken into account; including those of the countries which had ratified the Treaty, such as Spain which had done so twice.

Ireland had to bear in mind that Europe was a stakeholder in the Irish situation as much as Ireland was a stakeholder in the European integration process. Given the fact that the decisions taken in Ireland would have an impact on the whole European Union, it is logical that the European Union follows with great care what is happening in Ireland. The consequences of another rejection of the Treaty ought to be clearly explained so that the Irish citizens would be aware of it when making their decision.

Contrary to what had been said by the members of the European Parliament, the members of the Sub Committee considered that no referendum would be possible before the European elections. Some of these members claimed there was a general feeling amongst the Irish citizens that Ireland could get a better deal in a re-negotiation of the Lisbon Treaty. However the members of the delegation excluded any possibility of renegotiation.

Some members of the Sub Committee raised the issue of a "flexible opting out" for Ireland. The members of the delegation, in particular Mrs Frassoni, pointed out the fact that there was no need for an opting out on social and family matters. Mrs Frassoni added that in this debate, a difference should be made between the policies of the European Union, which are decided by the governments of the Member States, and the European Institutions, which are a tool at the service of these policies.

Exchange of views with Mr Brandon Halligan, Chairperson of the Irish Institute for International and European Affairs

Mr. Halligan was also of the opinion that no referendum would be held before the European elections. The current Government was in a difficult situation. However, there was no evidence that the situation would be better in autumn.

Concerning the 'No' vote itself, Mr. Halligan recalled that safeguards addressing all concerns expressed in the referendum campaign had already been foreseen in the Irish legal system; still it was not enough to convince the people that there was no danger in the Lisbon Treaty.



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS SECRETARIAT

AFCO Committee Delegation Visit to Dublin (Ireland) on Wednesday, 29 October 2008

PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 28 October 2008

Flight to Dublin Departure: Brussels, 21.15 pm
 Arrival: Dublin, 21.55 pm
 individual transfer to the hotel

Wednesday, 29 October 2008

08.30 am - 09.30 am free for individual meetings
 For interested Members: possibility of a briefing by Mr
 Francis Jacobs (EP Dublin Office) in the delegation hotel

09.45 am - 10.45 am Meeting with Mr Dick Roche, Minister of State at the
 Department of the Taoiseach and Minister of State at the
 Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for
 European Affairs
 Department of the Taoiseach, Merrion Street, Dublin 2

11.00 am - 13.00 pm Meeting with the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Ireland's
 future in the European Union;
 Committee Room 4, LH2000, Leinster House, Kildare Street

13.15 pm +/- Lunch and possibly exchange of views with representatives of
15.00 pm think thanks and/or civil society in the European Parliament
 Information Office in Ireland. (possibly Mr Brandon Halligan,
 Chairman of Irish Institute for International and European
 Affairs)
 43 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2

15.00 pm / 16.00 individual transfer to the airport
p.m.

Flights to Brussels to Brussels via London : 16.30 Arrival at 22.05 pm
 to Brussels direct : 18.00 Arrival at 20.35 pm